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Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

REPORT ON MEDICAL TRAVEL IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Chair: Mr. Charles Dent, MLA

105-00493/

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THE HONOURABLE ANTHONY (TONY) WHITFORD, MLA
SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight has the honour of presenting its Report on Medical Travel in the Northwest Territories, and commends it to the House.

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Chair

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REPORT ON MEDICAL TRAVEL IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Health Care in the Northwest Territories continues to be a top priority for many residents and for this Legislature. As our population grows and ages, we can expect to see additional demands on the health system particularly in the area of medical travel.

Many insured services are not available in the smaller communities, therefore residents must travel to regional centres for services and or treatment. Even in the regional centres, not all hospitals are fully equipped to provide all insured services and in these instances the Government of the Northwest Territories has a Medical Travel Policy that applies to eligible persons.

The policy states:

> **The Government of the Northwest will provide medical travel benefits to eligible persons in the Northwest Territories who must travel in order to access necessary and appropriate health services (Medical Travel Policy 49.06. 1 Statement of Policy)**

The Policy further states that:

> **The Government of the Northwest Territories will adhere to the following principles when implementing this Policy:**
>
> 1. **The Canadian health care system is based on universal access to insured health services**
> 2. **The cost of medical travel should not be an economic barrier to insured health services**
> 3. **The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to reducing the economic barriers to insured health services. (Medical Travel Policy 49.06.2)**

Members have raised concerns respecting the application of various aspects of the Policy including eligibility, provision and level of benefits on medical travel, intercommunity transportation, escorts, patient boarding and local transportation of indigent patients.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs in its Report on the Review of the 2002-2003 Main Estimates had this to say about Medical Travel.

The Standing Committee on Social Programs has commented on their concerns about the application of the Department's Medical Travel Policy in past Reports to this Assembly.

Many of the complaints that MLA's get from their constituents are about the uneven application of the Medical Travel Policy by the individual Health Authorities. As well, because many extended families have relatives in different Health Authorities, they talk about the differences of application for each Authority. The lack of perceived consistency breeds resentment between communities and families. Members of the Committee look forward to the results of the review of the Extended Health Benefits that is currently underway. There is hope, that as a result of this study, a clear, concise and evenly applied policy on Medical Travel can be developed and communicated to the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Members of the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight have chosen to use the theme of Medical Travel in their Members Statements and Questions today.